

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
FINANCIAL MEETING MINUTES  
FEBRUARY 7, 2024**

Present: Ryan Curley-First Selectman, John Dillon, Michael Hernandez (via Zoom), Robert Hetrick, Jr., Shaun Manning, Michael Pelton, Jim Tripp

Staff: Tom Robinson (Finance Director), Police Capt. Scott Cunningham, Charles Britton (Supt. Of Schools), Ryan O’Halpin (Dir. Of Public Works)

Others Present: Dan Bertram (Brainerd Place), Members of the BOE, Public and Media

**1. FIRST SELECTMAN CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

First Selectman Ryan Curley called the Financial Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Buck-Foreman Community Room located at 265 Main Street, Portland, Connecticut.

**2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**3. EXECUTIVE SESSION: POLICE SECURITY MATTERS**

At 7:01 Shaun Manning made a motion to enter the Executive Session, seconded by Michael Pelton, all were in favor, motion carried. Captain Scott Cunningham was invited into the session.

Executive Session ended at 7:31 PM.

**4. ACCEPT AGENDA**

Shaun Manning made a motion to accept the agenda, seconded by Jim Tripp, all were in favor, motion carried.

**5. APPROVE MINUTES: (Regular) January 17, 2024**

Shaun Manning made a motion, seconded by John Dillon, to approve the January 17, 2024 minutes. Michael Hernandez said the minutes reflected that he was absent; however, he attended via zoom. Shaun Manning made a motion, seconded by John Dillon, to approve the amended January 17, 2024 minutes. All were in favor, motion carried.

**6. COMMUNICATIONS/CORRESPONDENCE**

Andy Bauer will attend the next BOS meeting regarding the Clean Energy Task Force preliminary plans for a possible electric vehicle charging station.

Ryan Curley read into the record a letter from Supt. of Schools Britton regarding a BOE deficit caused by student outplacement resulting in a freeze of all unessential spending.

Ryan told of the plans of DOT to change the flow of traffic from Rt. 9 North and across the bridge into Portland by removing two lights. Instead, travelers would traverse down Main Street Middletown and over the bridge. Portland and the Chamber of Commerce are not in favor of what DOT is proposing. A solution is being worked on and alternatives will be discussed at workshops later in February. What they are presently proposing is not a good option for Portland. There is concern that the additional traffic on Main Street Middletown will block the flow of traffic making it difficult for emergency vehicles to travel through that area.

Ryan told of a \$200,000 new grant program that will be launched giving local businesses an opportunity to apply for grants. He plans to visit Portland's businesses to make them aware of this program.

**7. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Elwin Guild, Middle Haddam Road, commented on the restoration of the three historical houses at Brainerd Place and said that they need to be to the standards of the Secretary of the Interior. He again reiterated that Phase 3 is key to having a mixed-use development.

**8. MONTHLY BUDGET REPORT**

Tom Robinson delivered the monthly financial report on the revenues and the expenditures and commented on the ones that they need to continue to watch.

**9. RESOLUTION: FUND TRANSFER FOR TRACKLESS MOWER – PUBLIC WORKS HIGHWAY DIVISION**

Ryan O'Halpin explained the need for the fund transfer. They attempted to order the same trackless mower, although it looked exactly the same, the manufacturer had taken some features off the base model.

Shaun Manning read the resolution and moved to accept it. It was seconded by Jim Tripp. All were in favor, motion carried.

**RESOLUTION  
BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
Town of Portland, Connecticut**

**FEBRUARY 7, 2024**

**FUNDS TRANSFER FOR TRACKLESS MOWER – PUBLIC WORKS HIGHWAY DIVISION**

WHEREAS, in account #08-141-000-89090 Public Works-Highway Division \$205,000 was budgeted in in the FY 2024 Capital Improvement Plan for a Trackless Mower; and

WHEREAS, during the review of the specification the Highway Division identified safety features that were previously standard equipment on the Trackless Mower were now options that needed to be added on; and

WHEREAS, these safety feature options will cost approximately \$6,065 above the \$205,000 originally budgeted; and

WHEREAS, in account # 08-141-000-89090 funds remain from four older now complete projects; and

WHEREAS, the total amount of \$6,065 comprised of \$3,299 "Plow replacement," \$130 "Water Compressor/Sand Blast," \$2,288 "Purchase of Dump Body," and \$248 "Hot Box"; and

WHEREAS, "Replace Trackless Mower" looks to be short funds to add necessary safety features/options; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Selectmen hereby approves the transfer of \$6,065 to "Replace Trackless Mower" from \$3,299 "Plow replacement," \$130 "Water Compressor/Sand Blast," \$2,288 "Purchase of Dump Body," and \$248 "Hot Box," all with the account #08-141-000-89090 Public Works-Highway Division.

## **10. DISCUSSION ON SCHOOL FACILITIES AND GREAT BLUE RESEARCH INC. SURVEY RESULTS**

A lengthy discussion ensued regarding the survey results. The entire discussion can be viewed on YouTube at the Town website.

Michael Hernandez: His main concern was with the number of students attending just one mega school. Specifically, he doesn't know how all the students can be effectively intermingled, how they can be accommodated during gym and will they be given enough time to eat their lunch. How will they be accommodated if the enrollment goes up? He also is concerned that the timelines in the Ed Spec report. They don't seem to line up correctly especially for the completion dates. What about the needs for other improvements during the construction process, i.e., the roof of Valley View that needs to be corrected before it collapses. There's no mention of a dehumidification system and he would like to see plans for that. If a megaschool is decided upon, we need to think about underground utilities and if the lines are capable of handling the loads. If larger lines are required for the infrastructure, then High Street will need to be torn up so those costs need to be added into the construction cost. Has there been any thought about moving BOE from Town Hall to the school so they can be more in touch? Maybe there should be a solar array on the hill to cut down on electrical costs. His opinion is to keep things as is and do the upgrades as needed. If one major school is in the referendum, he will have a tough time swallowing it.

Shaun Manning said he was an advocate of the survey. He believes that if there is a majority of something, we should support it with what we said we would do. Going back to the sight lines report, he asks, for example the wording for the electrical system is the same for each of the schools. He wonders if someone went line by line and checked off boxes or

did someone actually look at it and decide whether or not it should be accepted? He is also supportive of capital improvements. During fire department training, he observed peeling paint. Is it because we don't have enough money to paint our schools? Referring to the letter Ryan read regarding the BOE budget that was put forth and now the school deficit, he wonders if it is worth bonding and he asks if we have BOE leadership that will spend our money wisely.

Michael Pelton said it appears the public is most comfortable with the one-school concept but some of the things, particularly the costs, give him pause. However, the missing element is what will happen to the vacant school. He encouraged that we get that information as soon as possible. Once we have the possible use of it, the town people will have a better understanding of options and the cost thereof. Keep all of the options on the table. Go with the best interests for the town and advocate for that.

John Dillon said that when we do a survey, you get a lot of data, some good, some not. He went to the pie chart. What jumped out was that 80% of the people, before they vote, want information on what will happen to the buildings. There are quite a few people that want to see Brownstone remain in town hands. Looking back, on August 16, 2023, we voted to create this Land and Building Usage Assessment Committee. Nothing has come from that committee and the town people want that information when they go to vote. People want what is best for their kids and families but they want to pay the bare minimum. 71% want to make sure the mill rate doesn't get increased. An awful lot of work has to be done. The vote counts. When looking at the executive summary, one statement jumped out. There is concern if we will be expending all of our funds on what will be chosen. If a large number of Portland residents are okay with it, and we keep it in town hands, essentially we are taking it from one side of the ledger sheet and moving it to the other side for the taxpayers. There may be opportunities for a solar array or rentals to other schools. There are ways we can make it a cost neutral building. The people need to know all pertinent information by the time they go to vote.

JimTripp echoed the concern that we need the information in a timely manner as expressed by John Dillon. We don't have a lot of time and we need to get it done. People want us to derive some of the recurring savings. That's what was missing as he read the survey results. When you have three options, it brings in an interesting dynamic. He finds it hard to believe that folks would want to take down one and replace two. The majority want us to do some consolidation and derive some benefit from it. That's what was missing. We look at the cost and what we are doing with the mill rate. It takes into account the basic reimbursement from the state but it doesn't take into account the operational savings you would get. He has confidence in the BOE. Referring to the other part of their discussion, they got hit with additional cost that wasn't anticipated. He agrees that we need to make sure we have public sessions so everyone knows what is going to happen to all of the buildings. Having worked with the BOE, he has the greatest confidence that they will be working the numbers. They got hit with a great deal of additional cost that was not anticipated, i.e., the number of student outplacement. The cost is being shared less and less at the state level. It is important that we have public sessions to answer the different questions, not just what will happen to the buildings but we also need to take a look at our

bonded debt and what is going to be coming on and what is going to be coming off and the recurring savings. How much will be offset. What will the net be for the taxpayer.

Robert Hetrick said he was concerned that a school that size only has one cafeteria and is also concerned how the additional traffic on High Street will be managed with the buses disembarking and more kids being dropped off by their parents.

John Dillon referred to an earlier BOS amendment saying that the Committee will provide a preliminary report. He now wonders if we need to re-think that charge in order to use their time more wisely.

Ryan said the Committee will have their first meeting this month and should provide us with some very useful information. We must come up with the best plan that will get us a “yes” vote in November.

John Dillon added that we must make sure we continue to focus on the kids. We can't have a repeat of what happened 20-some years ago. We must be transparent and pump as much information out to the public as possible. The key is to let the public know what we will do with each of the schools. Jim Tripp added that it is important to let the public know that we will be taking care of all of our schools and update them as to the plans.

## **11. PROPOSED REVISIONS TO POLICY ON FIXING REAL PROPERTY ASSESSMENTS**

The subcommittee members were Shaun, Bobby, John and Ryan. They took all the recommendations and they spent time reviewing them. The revisions were also reviewed by the tax assessor and the town attorney. The revised policy and application were sent to all the BOS members for review. They put some boundaries in place and set some timelines, applications and deadlines. It is business-friendly and competitive with other communities. Jim Tripp said there needs to be additional verbiage to clarify that the final terms will be determined by the BOS. Ryan said the verbiage Jim suggested can be incorporated in the document. The subject will also be an item on the next BOS agenda.

## **12. APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS**

Robert Hetrick nominated Ken Woodward to the Land and Building Usage Assessment Committee, seconded by Shaun Manning, all were in favor, motion carried.

Robert Hetrick nominated Brian Walsh to the Land and Building Usage Assessment Committee, seconded by Shaun Manning, all were in favor, motion carried.

Robert Hetrick nominated Warren Breece to the Land and Building Usage Assessment Committee, seconded by Shaun Manning, all were in favor, motion carried.

Robert Hetrick nominated Angela Aresco to the Land and Building Usage Assessment Committee, seconded by Shaun Manning, all were in favor, motion carried.

### **13. REFUNDS OF EXCESS PAYMENTS:**

Robert Hetrick made a motion, seconded by Michael Pelton, to reimburse Kelly, Eric R. [\$502.74]. All were in favor; motion carried.

Robert Hetrick made a motion, seconded by Michael Pelton, to reimburse CCAP Auto Lease LTD [\$769.43]. All were in favor; motion carried.

### **14. STATUS REPORTS**

Ryan Curley shared the following:

- Two new police officers are being sworn in this month: Justin Cochran from New Jersey and William Mudano, Middletown police officer.
- There were two promotions to police sergeants: Dan Knapp and James Capello.
- Dave Kuzminski retired after 50 years of employment. A formal party will take place at St. Clements on March 7. Ticket sales are funding the event.
- A Long-Range Capital meeting will take place next week. The budget is due on March 1<sup>st</sup>. The grand list was finalized as of January 31<sup>st</sup>. We took a hit on motor vehicles but real estate and personal property was better.

Shaun Manning attended the Library Board meeting where they had the election of officers. They are considering a process to retrieve long lost items and hopefully get the people back into the Library.

John Dillon attended the BOE meeting. They talked about the items that were discussed tonight. It was a long and detailed meeting.

Shaun Manning gave an update on the firetruck that was just approved. The pump was installed; they are going over lighting and there is a 90-day turnaround on it. The replacement truck loaned to us by East Hampton is in service. Shaun said he drove it to a call this morning.

### **15. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Laurel Steinhauser (BOE) thanked the BOS for the good conversation and said how lucky we are to have the leadership of Supt. Britton and Stephanie Fragola. Their leadership has the full backing of the BOE. We all want the same thing and we want to do it in a way that has the least impact on our taxpayers. Her takeaway from the BOE meeting was consensus and cooperation. Be good partners and collaborative. We must do the best for the community and the children.

Paula Agogliati, Victoria Road, said she raised four children that went through the school system. She hopes people took the time to do the survey. The BOS represents us. You have your own opinion but you have to listen to what the people want. It was difficult for my children going to different schools every two years, it was horrible. You need to represent

what we the citizens are asking. People don't let their houses deteriorate; they put money into them. E. Hampton always puts money into their schools. If you don't put money into the schools, they will deteriorate.

Mike Agogliati, 4 Victoria Road, said they were told things 20 years ago that never happened. People haven't forgotten what happened in the past. He hopes you guys will put the information up correctly. The last time the state bailed us out. Sooner or later you have to do something. The people want two schools closed. You're looking for a \$600 increase in taxes in addition to what they are already paying plus insurance. The roads are a mess in town; they are horrible. We don't do anything in this town because we don't have the money. I get it. Sooner or later, you've got to do something. You can't keep raising taxes. You've got to do what the survey says because it is just getting too expensive.

#### **16. BOARD OF SELECTMEN GENERAL INFORMAL DISCUSSION**

Michael Hernandez said Public Works has expressed an interest in taking over the ownership of old Engine 3 and asked what the process in doing so would be. Their mechanic said it was fit for service and it would be converted to a flatbed for miscellaneous use. If approved, how would they transfer it to Public Works. Ryan said he will look into it.

Ryan said he hasn't forgotten about the Mac 47-48. We will need a public hearing for it. We got sidetracked with Engine 3. We will get back to that and will take care of it.

#### **17. FOLLOW-UP ITEMS**

- **Review Town Charter**
- **Ethics Ordinance**

#### **18. EXECUTIVE SESSION: FIXED ASSESSMENT AGREEMENT**

At 9:27 p.m. Shaun Manning made a motion to enter the Executive Session, and invited Dan Bertram of Brainerd Place to join the session, it was seconded by Jim Tripp. All were in favor, motion carried. Dan Bertram was invited into the Executive Session.

The Executive Session ended at 11:28 p.m.

#### **19. ADJOURN MEETING**

Shaun Manning made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Bobby Hetrick. Vote unanimous; the meeting was adjourned at 11:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Hoy, Board Clerk